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ABSTRACT

Although California's 106 Community Colleges' mission to accept any student who can profit from instruction and to provide transfer programs and vocational, continuing, and community education invites the non-traditional student to benefit from college education, the Community College students' success is not guaranteed because of the low quality education and high drop out rate in high school. The Educational Testing Service reports that students entering two-year colleges read at an average grade level of 7.1. The National Assessment of Educational Progress reports that secondary students receive very little instruction in writing. These and other deficiencies are apparent in high school graduation statistics. Although California passed minimum competency requirements for high school graduation, nearly 25% of 1981 seniors either lacked the credits to graduate or failed the competency exam. Of those failing the exam, 16% were Hispanics. Low-cost, easily accessible California Community Colleges, 5.5% of whose professional employees are Hispanic, enroll a larger number of Hispanics than any other segment of the California higher education system. Approximately 10% of the students are Hispanics. To ensure the success of these students, the Community Colleges must continue to provide instruction in basic skills and to urge participation in college governing activities. (SB)

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CHICANOS IN THE CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES: DECLINING BASIC SKILLS, EARLY HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND THE DECLINE OF QUALITY HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

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CHICANOS IN THE CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES:
DECLINING BASIC SKILLS, EARLY HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION
AND
THE DECLINE OF QUALITY HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

The California Community Colleges affect the lives of every Californian. There are 106 Community Colleges throughout the State, and that figure does not include Community Centers or Extension Centers.

The Community Colleges enroll more than 1.2 million students:

- .two thirds are part-time students
- .three-quarters work full or part-time
- .the average age is 26
- .nearly half attend classes in the evening
- .about one third are ethnic minority groups
- .72% of recent high school graduates who go on to college enroll in Community Colleges
- .one out of every 13th California adult is currently being served by a Community College
- .one in every two California adults has, at some point, attended a Community College[1]

The California Master Plan of Higher Education outlined the functions of the three segments of higher

education: University of California, California State Colleges and Universities, and the Community Colleges.

The accessibility of the Community College to all students can be understood if the mission of the Community Colleges can be outlined briefly here:

1. Community Colleges accept any student who can profit from instruction
2. Transfer programs coexist with
   .Vocational Education
   .Continuing Education
   .Community Education, although the source of funds for implementation has been elimated the benefits from previous taxation of Community Services is still apparent in the form of buildings and the right of the Community to use the facilities.

The philosophy of the Community College and its mission invite the nontraditional student to benefit from a college education. While students who qualify for the Educational Opportunities Program have a better chance of success; other students are left to their own resources to survive. It is this dilemma of the "open door" that sometimes has been referred to as the "revolving door," i.e., we accept students but we do not provide a system to guarantee their success.

Because the California Community Colleges are so diverse and big, we have difficulty just knowing what is being done in other Community Colleges in providing academic skills to our students. Many Community Colleges have installed Learning Centers, and projects from the Improvement of Instruction Fund (C.C.C.) are in the assessment and prescription of skills for minority students.

Some Community Colleges have already began the implementation of a campus wide reading and writing program. A Community College in the San Francisco Bay Area has also passed a specific reading and writing requirement for graduation. A College in the San Bernardino area has placed prerequisites in reading for certain courses.

That brings me back to the problem of basic skills and the students that we are getting from the high schools. The quality of education, drop out rate, early graduation, and the alienation of students towards the high school push enrollments into the Community Colleges. Furthermore, California's drop out rate is twice the national average. Consider the following statistics:

1. The California drop-out rate ranges from 13% among 14-year olds to 30% among 17-year olds.
2. Drop-out rates for blacks is 15% and higher for Hispanics, 23%

Reasons stated for dropping-out are as follows:

.Dislike of school (36% White)

.Economic reasons (38% Hispanics)

.Pregnancies (41% Black Females)

It is interesting to note that students do not indicate academic deficiencies as a reason for dropping out. California's attrition rate between the ninth and twelfth grade has increased from 12% to 22% from 1967 to 1976. Students who graduate early are included in the figure, but most of the attrition reflected are dropouts.[2]

The report "Why Kids Drop Out of School," reported that the California rate is probably due to higher mobility, lack of community cohesiveness, dissatisfaction with school, and the perceived lack of value of a high school diploma by students.

The drop-outs', or what other educators call push-outs', last chance in gaining an education is the Community College. However, with the lack of basic skills it is imperative that Community Colleges continue to provide basic instruction in reading and writing. Vocational education, an area that used to be"reserved for minorities"in the past, is also dependent on basic skills. The vocational student of the 1980's is required to read complicated shop manuals and to communicate in writing various processes. Technical writing and reading are becoming established courses in Community Colleges' curriculum.

But,can the students read? A decline in reading skills was reported early in 1981. According to a National Assessment of Education Progress study:

> The reading skills of White teenagers nearing high school graduation have declined over the past ten years, while those of younger students especially Blacks, have risen substantially.
>
> The major decline...appeared in their reasoning ability or "inferential comprehension" revealed by answers to questions requiring deduction rather than factual recall.[3]

The causes for the reading decline of youths have not been provided by researchers. National Assessment of Education Progress' Director Roy H. Forbes, an education professor at Indiana University remarked to a question posed about the reasons for the decline:

> Something is going on there. We don't know exactly what it is. It's a funny group population.[4]

James Coleman "speculated it might be due to the deterioration of school discipline beyond the elementary years."[5]

The average reading level of students entering two year colleges was determined by the Educational Testing Service to be at the 7.1 grade level.[6] Reading achievement for minority students has been reported to be less than White students elsewhere.

What about writing? Are high school students being taught or learning to write? Can students write a coherent paragraph? an essay? Can students write an essay on the "causes of the civil war?"

The research of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAESP) Third National Writing Assessment released in mid January 1981 points to a bleak picture.[7] The assessment studied the writing of 40,000 students ages nine, thirteen, and seventeen in 1969-70, 1973-74, and 1978-79. That report indicated that

> neither 13-year olds nor 17-year olds receive a great deal of direct instruction in writing, or are required to do much writing in school.[8]

The report showed that 17-year olds' negative attitudes towards writing "hardens and grows somewhat larger" with age. In both 1974 and 1979, substantial portions of 17-year olds reported that they are assigned little or no writing in school. More than half said they had written three or fewer papers in all their courses combined over a six week period. If writing skills are weak for high school graduates, one can imagine how they are for drop outs and minority students.

In a report of the National Center for Education Statistics (HIGH SCHOOL AND BEYOND, 1981) 33% of the Hispanic seniors were enrolled in English remedial courses, 31% of the Black seniors were also enrolled in the same type of courses. White and Asian seniors comprised 31% each while Native Americans had the largest enrollment with 40% of their group in remedial English.

The report also indicates certain statistics that help us undertand somewhat the decline in quality education in the high schools:

.45% of students in the West were enrolled in general high school programs, 34% in academic, and 20% in vocational programs

.Hispanics are next to the Native Americans in taking course work in mathematics and science. The percentage of 1980 high school seniors taking three years or more of course work in mathematics and science is as follows:

	Math	Science
Asian	48%	32%
Black	35%	19%
White	33%	23%
Hispanic	27%	14%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	22%	12%

.Seniors spend fewer hours per week on homework in 1980 than they did in 1972

	1972	1980
None	11%	7%
Less than 5	54%	68%
5-10	30%	18%
10+	6%	7%

In an effort to improve the quality of high school education the State of California passed minimum competency laws in 1976. Furthermore, to encourage promising students to achieve, an early high school graduation could be earned if the student could pass an examination administered by the State. The State Superintendent of Public Instruction in California, Dr. Wilson Riles reported on June 1981 that almost 25% of the high school seniors might not be able to graduate in June 1981 due to lack of credits and/or failing to pass the minimum graduation requirements from high school. A clarification is in order here; the graduation requirements are not set up by the State of California. The local boards of education have the responsibility of determining the minimum competencies for the District's seniors.

The Superintendent reported the following reasons for seniors not graduating:

.Transiency

.Absenteeism

.Lack of motivation

.Language difficulties

.Continuing lack of parental involvement

The impact of the test on minorities is as follows:

.15% of the students were Anglo

.16% Asian

.29%Hispanics

.35% Blacks

The percentages of students failing to graduate due to the examination can be computed by eliminating from the percentages those seniors that although completed all of the requirements for graduation still needed a specific course or units to graduate:

. 11% of the seniors who failed the test were Anglo and Asian
. 16% of the seniors were Hispanics
. 17% of the seniors were Black[10]

The same article indicated that 19% of the English speakers and 48% of the limited English speakers failed one or more tests.

One out of 5 high schools in the nation now require seniors to pass a minimum competency examination for graduation and two out three have a specific remedial program for students who fail the test.

The problem of literacy is not restricted to the high schools or the Community Colleges. The C.S.U.C. budgeted 2.6 million to support remedial education in the system's 19 campuses in 1981. An article reported that freshman who took the English placement examination in the C.S.U.C. were failing the text at a high rate:

. 53% incoming freshman failed the test at Cal State Northridge
. 78% at Cal State L.A. and 51% at Cal State Long Beach also failed the placement examination

The four year institutions turn to the high schools and place the blame of the decline at their doorstep:

.High schools have provided a lot of "unusual electives"

.Students do not practice composition

.Student attendance

.Class sizes continue to grow[11]

California Community Colleges are organized to provide educational services to all areas of the State. The 106 Community Colleges and Centers are easily accessible to almost every California resident. Entry requirements are such that a person who is 18 years or older can enroll in the Colleges' programs. High School seniors can also attend under special conditions.

It is not surprising to note that the residents of California use their Community Colleges to achieve a variety of educational goals. Students who are "pushed out" by high schools, high school graduates that do not qualify for the University or the C.S.C.U. system have no other alternative of education. Low in cost and easy to reach, Community Colleges enroll a larger number of Hispanics than any segment of higher education in California:

System			
Community Colleges	87,813		11.25%
California State University	15,193		8.81%
Independent Institutions	5,337		7.5 %
University of California	4,931		5.8 %
	113,274	10.2%	

(Fall 1979)

The undergraduate enrollment might appear high; however, while the number of students continues to grow, the proportion to the overall Community College population has remained relatively stable. Data from the Chancellor's Office of the California Community Colleges bear this out:

Year	Number Hispanics	Percent	Black Percent
1976	99,025	10%	9%
1977	92,209	9%	8%
1978	98,644	10%	8%
1979	101,374	10%	9%
1980	128,079	10%	8%

Information System Project
Student Data System

The California Postsecondary Education Commission in Equal Educational Opportunity in California Postsecondary Education, Part III (March 1980) made the following conclusions on "educational opportunities for ethnic minorities":

> .Chicanos and Blacks are underrepresented
>
> ...The underrepresentation of Chicano students is particularly severe since they constitute the largest and fastest-growing ethnic minority group in California.

> .During the past four years, some progress has been made in increasing the enrollment of ethnic minority undergraduate students ...At the graduate level, however, little progress has been made in increasing minority enrollment...increases [Chicano] have not kept pace with the growth of the Chicano population.
>
> ...Chicano undergraduates have a higher concentration in the Community Colleges, but an extremely low representation in the University
>
> .Among students admitted to baccalaureate programs, Chicanos, ...are more likely to have difficulty in persisting through their educational program than are white and Asian students
>
> .Chicanos..have proportionally higher enrollments in the less-empirical disciplines than in the more scientific and mathematically oriented disciplines.[12]

Employment of Hispanics in California Community Colleges has not progressed as fast as some of us would like. In a REPORT TO THE STATE LEGISLATURE ON THE PROGRESS OF THE CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PROGRAM

(January 1981) the system's Chancellor indicated that Hispanics had only increased .3% from 1977 to 1979 in professional jobs. Professional job progress was higher for Blacks and Asians (.4% increase each) and lower for Native Americans and Alaskan Natives (.1%). Hispanics held 5.2% of a total of 20,473 professional positions in 1977 and 5.5% of the 1979 19,733 positions.[13]

The presence of minority employees in institutions of higher education helps minority students identify with the school and provides a source of identification of positive role models for Hispanics. The presence of minority personnel also affects the institution's philosophy and development of policies and procedures that affect minority students.

The California Community Colleges provides some Hispanic role models for all students at different levels and at different percentages, the higher the position in status, the lower the number of Hispanics:

Position	1977 Number	%	1979 Number	%
Executive/Administrative Management	128	5.3%	162	6.5%
Faculty (Full time)	853	5.0	812	5.1
Professional (Non-faculty)	103	8.8	125	9.0
Secretarial/Clerical	706	9.1	716	9.4
Technical Paraprofessional	237	8.7	221	9.1
Skilled Crafts	82	9.9	830	8.9
Service/Maintenance	707	15.0	702	15.9[14]

A California Post Secondary Education Commission report (March 1981) indicated that the public institutions of higher education in California made "modest increases in both numbers and the proportions of women and ethnic minorities." [15]

I digress somewhat in my address to you to point out that in addition to lack of quality education in the secondary schools, high drop-out rates, school alienation, and a hit or miss policy of providing basic skills to all students in the California Community Colleges, there is also a problem of lack of positive role models for all students.

Furthermore, the recent attacks on the Community College system and the literacy problem will have an adverse impact on students who enroll in California Community Colleges:

1. The Kissler Report was quoted as saying that the quality of transfer education in California Community Colleges was lower than the University system.[16]
2. The Wilms study on VOCATIONAL TRAINING and SOCIAL MOBILITY, A STUDY OF PUBLIC AN PROPRIETARY SCHOOL DROPOUTS," indicated that the "least advantaged students are most likely to drop out of...training programs...and that dropping out does not make much difference in terms of placement

and earnings."[17]

Wilms; therefore, questioned the value of Community College vocational education and gave a boost to proprietary schools.

3. The California State Colleges and Universities have reacted somewhat differently than the other systems to the literacy problem and the Community College transfer. The system has now a junior writing competency examination for all students and the general education requirements have been modified. Articulation with the 19 campuses will now have to be negotiated
4. The State Legislature has chosen to cut the financial support of the system, e.g, enrollment cap, deflator according to the State revenues, English as a Second Language funding, although the participation of minority students is the highest. It is interesting to note that the Community Colleges were financed in the 1960's when there were no significant numbers of minority students; however, now that minority students are participating in the system the reduction has begun.

5. English for Speakers of Other Languages has now been funded at a different level. The high school districts are now interested in providing this type of instruction. I question if all students really can be forced to continue in a "high school oriented" educational climate. Are students from these high schools encouraged to continue on to the next level of education?

It is my hope that I have provided you with some idea of the magnitude of the problem. The Community College has to be a College that guarantees success to all students. We cannot allow students to get "sifted out" of the system.

I caution you though. We do not have to overreact and misuse diagnostic instruments. Reliability and validity of instruments still remains unresolved in the education profession. "Back to basics" should not be used to eliminate but to democratize the system of equal education for all.

Now let's go back to the theme of the conference: Policy Development <u>In</u> the 80's for the 90's. The answer is in our hands: We must become involved in the governance of Community Colleges. We need people who are committed to quality education to run for boards of trustees. Ask

yourselves, "Do I have a Hispanic/Chicano/Mexicano/Mexican American on the Board of Trustees?" Why not? Can I be? Can I identify a candidate? It is at this place where you can have effective policy development and implementation of equal educational opportunity for all in the California Community College system.

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3.
4.

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